



# Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice

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Good Afternoon Senator Meyer, Representative Roy and members of the committee,

My name is Dr. Mark Mitchell and I am the president of the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice. I am here to testify in favor of HB5130, the An Act Concerning Child Safe Products and HB5126 an Act Establishing a Chemical Innovations Institute. I will also comment on HB5121, an Act Concerning Revisions in the Environmental Justice Community Statue.

These bills call for policies to *prevent harm* before damage is done, and to require that businesses and government choose the safest alternatives in a comprehensive fashion, rather than a chemical by chemical approach. The Child Safe Products Act, HB 5130, seeks to pinpoint toxic chemicals of greatest concern, in children's products, and work to phase these chemicals out so we can protect the health of our children. HB 5126 seeks to establish an institute to work with Connecticut business to find safer substitutes. Both of these bills are budget neutral. We have been meeting with the University of Connecticut, businesses and with the Connecticut Business and Industry Association to try to make sure that the Chemical Innovations Institute is of substantial benefit to Connecticut manufacturers in maintaining competitiveness and creating new green jobs.

The result of current government policies is that toxic substances come into our bodies without our knowledge or consent. We have seen that ignoring early warning signs can result in serious illness. The tragic histories of lead and mercury, for example, demonstrate the harm caused when government and industry do not take action to protect health. We have also seen that acting on early warnings can prevent widespread harm, as in the case of the drug thalidomide. Children are particularly vulnerable to many of these toxic chemicals.

Approximately 80,000 chemicals are licensed for use in commerce today. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has estimated that fewer than 10% of the industrial chemicals produced in the largest quantities (over one million pounds per year) have undergone even a limited set of tests to assess their health effects on humans. Most tests look only for acute toxicity or cancer-causing properties. Potential harm to a child's nervous system is rarely investigated. In fact, as of 1998, only 12 chemicals had been tested according to EPA standards for their impact on the developing human brain. Even less is known about what happens when people and ecosystems are repeatedly exposed to more than one chemical at a time.

Yet recent tests by the U.S. government have found hundreds of chemicals in the blood and urine of Americans.

In addition, many of these synthetic chemicals go into products sold in stores. While the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission frequently takes action to prevent safety hazards in products, chemical toxicity hazards to consumers are far less regulated. No pre-market safety testing or approval has been required under any federal law for chemicals in cosmetics, toys, clothing, carpets or construction materials, to name just a few obvious sources of chemical exposure in everyday life. Products like hair spray, hair dye, pacifiers, stain repellants, glues, and children's toys have been put on the market, only to be found, after decades of widespread use, to contain toxic compounds at unsafe levels.

These dangerous products end up, all too often, buried in landfills or burned in incinerators in low-income communities and communities of color. These communities pay a very high cost in terms of increased levels of asthma, cancer, diabetes, and so forth as a result of exposure to the toxins that are in these products. This issue of disposal adds an additional urgency to the need to find safer substitutes to the dangerous chemicals children, along with the rest of us, are exposed to on a continual basis.

I would like to say a few words regarding, HB 5121, an Act Concerning revisions in the Environmental Justice Community Statue.

I am proud to announce that the current environmental justice statue, passed in 2008, is working very well. There are some technical adjustments and improvements that Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice would support, but we would like the bill held this year in light of the short legislative session and the importance of the chemical reform bills to our membership.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.